

## Afterlife

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/31522838) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/31522838>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings</a>
Category:	<a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">Shadow and Bone (TV)</a> , <a href="#">The Grisha Trilogy - Leigh Bardugo</a> , <a href="#">Grishaverse - Fandom</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">The Darkling   Aleksander Morozova/Alina Starkov</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Alina Starkov</a> , <a href="#">The Darkling   Aleksander Morozova</a> , <a href="#">Mal Oretsev</a> , <a href="#">Genya Safin</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Ravka (Grishaverse)</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Supernatural Elements</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Modern Setting</a> , <a href="#">the claw ring makes a cameo in this fic</a> , <a href="#">this was very fun to write</a> , <a href="#">Ghosts</a> , <a href="#">Shifters</a> , <a href="#">the darkling is a bastard and we love him for it</a> , <a href="#">no beta we die like Mal should have in book 1</a> , <a href="#">Darklina Week 2021</a> , <a href="#">Mediator Alina</a> , <a href="#">Ghost Aleksander</a> , <a href="#">fuck tags i never know what i'm doing here</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of <a href="#">Darklina Week 2021</a>
Collections:	<a href="#">Darklina Week 2021</a> , <a href="#">Private Works</a>
Stats:	Published: 2021-05-25 Words: 3,644 Chapters: 1/1

# Afterlife

by Anonymous

## Summary

*“You are asking me to leave?”*

*“Not asking, shadow,” she said. “Telling. Time to get unlost, loser.”*

Day 3 Darklina Week prompt: Modern AU (I mean, barely)

Alina expels ghosts from purgatory.

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

When the tall, gorgeous, blond-haired guy opened the door, he looked down at her with blank surprise.

“Expecting some crystal balls or something?” Alina asked him, frown on her lips.

He blinked. “Oh, uh, so you’re the psychic.” He shrugged awkwardly. “Thanks for uh, coming by.”

Alina stepped past him into the frat house. “I mean, you are paying me,” she said, and followed her Sight to the upstairs bedrooms.

“Uh, yeah.” He followed her to the end of the stairs and then hollered past her. “Hey, Mal! Ghost hunter is here!”

Alina grabbed the rail and clutched it tightly, trying not to roll her eyes. She got no fucking respect in this line of work.

Alina had been using her “gift” of Sight since she’d dropped out of college, realizing the greater institution really didn’t suit her style. Jobs were easier to get than she’d expected—apparently there was no shortage of Ravkan ghosts permeating dark alleys and old homes, particularly in large cities like Os Alta. It made sense, really. War had torn the country apart for so long; there were bound to be lost spirits wandering aimlessly.

And luckily, Alina had a near monopoly over the job market. There were very few of her breed—shifters, people who could walk in and out of the holding world of the dead—and those who did do the job usually retired early due to, you know, going insane from entering the Fourth Plane all the time.

But Alina didn’t mind, and she sure as hell wasn’t going back to academia anytime soon.

She found herself knocking on the room at the end of the hall. Her Vision planted the spirit somewhere dead toward the back of the house. It felt off though, as if it were, well—

Another gorgeous man opened the door, taller and leaner than the first. Thick black hair, pillow lips, piercing blue eyes, with a jaw that could slice bread. Unfortunately, the look he was giving her was flat, fake, and definitely about to say something that would piss her off.

“I’ve never met a psychic before,” he said with a simpering grin plastered to his perfect face. “Thanks for stopping by.”

Alina did roll her eyes then. “Thanks for stopping by.” Myehmehblahblah, she mocked him to herself, what a dick. As if he weren’t hiring her, a skilled worker, to get rid of a ghost in his room.

She ignored him and walked around the room, feeling the cold and the still air around them. It was crazy cold, she noted, and while sometimes she really did play the part of house inspector (far too many people covered their vents and cried ghost when it was just poor

interior design) this chill practically had a neon sign screaming “Dead Guy Here!” for her to read.

Alina pulled out her mat from her bag and laid it down on the floor. She removed her leather jacket, placing it beside her, and began to make herself comfortable. She placed her fingertips on the floor in front of her and grimaced. Sticky, she thought to herself, gross.

Mal stood leaning in the doorway, blue eyes trailing her body and stopping right at her boobs. Classy.

“So how long is this thing gonna take?” he asked.

“Could be five minutes,” she said, closing her eyes. “Could be three hours.”

He blew out a breath of air, tapped the doorway. “Well, thanks Mr. Cable Guy.”

“Don’t mention it,” she said, and walked onto the Plane.

Alina looked around and had double-Vision for a moment, so she quickly straightened and stood her soul up and away from her body. The Plane was disorienting the first several times, for some it never stopped, but for Alina, her spirit felt as natural here as her body did in the room (which, for fairness, wasn’t much).

She looked around at Time and Space before her, and searched for the spirit.

The Plane didn’t have things like gravity, and time worked differently here. Alina could never seem to figure it out—sometimes what felt like moments here could be days on ground, sometimes what felt like a year here would be a moment there. (It made charging fees for her line of work a total pain.) She wondered if the time stretch had to do with the spirits she contacted, the ones she tried to find and send off, but that didn’t quite make sense, since spirits were, well.

So here’s the misconception: ghosts aren’t anything like most people think they are. Ghosts, spirits, they don’t look like people, like the people they had been. She remembered explaining this to Genya, her college friend, once. Genya had pressed her for details—they’d been three bottles of wine in and the slurring and confessions had flowed between them—and Alina could only describe what she saw the spirits as.

All they were, she explained, were floating light orbs.

“That’s it?” Genya asked, disappointed.

“Yeah,” Alina said, drinking from the bottle. “Dumb as rocks, too.”

Five years later, Alina had lots of experience to continually affirm that truth. Spirits, while capable of harm and irritation, were nothing more than floating light bulbs with no brainwaves to guide them.

Now to be clear, on the human plane, these guys were more irritating than harmful. The most trouble ghosts could get up to on the corporeal plane was to unsettle a house, or if it was

really powerful and mad, make a few harmful scratches as it tried to find a body to possess.

On the Spirit Plane though, they could fuck some shit up. It's why Alina did charge the big bucks, because she'd been bitten and snapped at and strangled by one-too-many a wild ghost on the Plane for comfort. She had one advantage: piercing her soul for its lifeblood could cause damage to spirits—just a splatter of blood on a soul could melt it like water to a wicked witch. But constantly bleeding herself wasn't exactly a walk in the park, or sustainable. She only ever did that in an emergency, a.k.a., once.

But as Alina wandered the Plane searching for this frat guy's ghost, she reminded herself that they usually were just lost souls, literally. Most were just confused bastards that needed to be led to the next life, or whatever came next.

The Plane was a complex multiverse where souls went when they died, and like any system, there were cogs to be worked out. Sometimes not every spirit made it to their destination and instead got stuck in the wheel, causing a mess on the human plane Alina was paid to clean up.

She never knew where they were going, but she did know how to unstick them, and to her, anything else was above her paygrade.

But as she walked through the Plane, using her Sight to guide her to the monkey wrench in this particular gear, all that greeted her was emptiness.

The gray reality of the Plane meant spirits were usually easy to pick out in the ether, but thus far, it had been hours (well, "hours" to her) and she saw nothing.

Which was why when she heard something, she screamed her goddamn head off.

"What are you?" the voice called, and Alina's heart nearly burst from her chest. Something was in here with her, and it could fucking *speak*.

Was it another shifter?

"Who the fuck are you?" she called, turning around and searching for someone, something. Alina blinked, narrowed her eyes and checked the horizon of the Plane. There was something there, but it sure as hell was no bright orb.

A wisp of a shadow, like liquid smoke, was coming straight for her.

"Who the fuck are you?" she asked again, trying not to let her legs shake. The shadow was in no hurry, but it wasn't timid or afraid either. It had no face, no mouth she could make out, but the sound was clearly coming from it.

"I know your kind," the shadow said, "but you are so different from them."

Alina growled and wondered what the hell it was talking about. Dumb as rocks, she reminded herself, even if this one can talk.

“My name is Alina,” she said, gathering her wits and leveling her voice. She cleared her throat and said with as much authority as she could, “and you don’t belong here. You are lost, and it’s time to move on.”

The shadow chuckled. “You are asking me to leave?”

Fuck, it had a personality.

Alina scoffed. “Not asking, shadow,” she said. “Telling. Time to get unlost, loser.”

The shadow paused before her, then danced to her left, encircling her.

“I’ve never seen you before,” he said, “but maybe I do know you.

“Shifter,” he hissed the name like a curse, like a gift.

“Yes,” she said, reaching for her pointed ring to draw blood. “And I’m being paid to evict your ass.”

She moved the clawed ring from her middle finger to her thumb, ready to begin the process.

It would be simple—draw blood, bind the spirit to herself, and then fling it far into the ether. It had felt too simple to work the first time she’d yeeted a ghost, but it had worked, and she was never one to look a gift horse in the mouth. Besides, this thing was wiggling her the fuck out and she wanted to get this over with.

Before she could prick her skin, however, the shadow spoke again.

“Alina,” he said, and she froze. “Don’t you want to know then? What I am? Who I am?”

Alina eyed it suspiciously and knew she was walking into a trap.

“Maybe I don’t fucking care,” she said, and he laughed.

“You do care, they all care.”

He backed away from her, beckoning her to follow. “Come this way, let me show you what I’ve learned here.”

Alina furrowed her brow, but her feet took involuntary steps forward. “There’s nothing here, this is the Plane,” she said. “There’s nothing else I need to know.”

“You don’t believe that.” It felt like a whisper in her mind.

“Alina,” he said again. “Can I show you what I’ve found?” He paused, hesitant almost. He was manipulating her, but there was a truth to his voice, one that begged her to follow.

“You’re stronger than any shifter I’ve seen here. I want to show you what I showed them.”

“Why,” Alina asked. She needed to get the fuck out of here. Why was she here again? Because some frat asswipe couldn’t afford another blanket?

“Because you’re special, Alina,” he cooed, “and I think you and I can change the world together.”

And before Alina could breathe, he shoved her into the Fifth Plane.

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She felt like water. She was wet, and warm, and something inside her was turning her around, and around, and around, but she didn’t feel dizzy. She ebbed and flowed like the tide, like a rip curl pulled to earth by its own weight and gravity, and it was eons before she opened her eyes.

A white stag stood before her, his maw larger than the universe, his antlers the hue of light. He stared into her soul and when Alina breathed, he breathed. They were one.

Behind her she could see—she could see behind her couldn’t she? she could see all around, above and below, through time and before time—a scaled sea creature, eyes like the dusk of a winter sky. Black and blue and cold, they swam above her as though she were nothing to them.

A bird on fire cried out, and her bones shook and bubbled at the sound.

She was surrounded by the Gods of old, and her unbound spirit was nothing more than a speck of dust, no, less—an atom of dust, to them.

She watched them move, more of them, all together, as they walked toward the spring in the center of their world. They drank from the spring, separate yet united beings, and drank until they were full.

Thousands and thousand of orbs flew from the spring into their mouths, their eyes, their hooves and claws and talons. A single drop to them was a hundred thousand souls gone in the blink of an eye.

But the orbs did not speak, and only their light gave them away.

The ether shifted, and shadows encircled her vision. Alina—a name? she had a name? she, who was nothing but a drop of light touching the stag’s tongue?—was called down, and she didn’t fight it.

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Alina gasped for air on the Fourth Plane, the one she once had found disarming, and now felt like a soft mattress.

She’d just seen the fucking afterlife.

“Holy,” Alina panted, wiping the sweat off her brow, “fuck.”

The shadow before her said nothing. Alina lay down on the ground, breathing through her nose, exhaling through her mouth, again and again until she felt whole.

She had so many questions, but none of them fucking mattered. Who the shadow was didn't matter, who she was didn't matter, none of it fucking mattered.

The afterlife was a spring the size of a multiverse, and she was a drop in the ocean.

"Alina," the shadow called, its inky blackness touched her arm and she felt clammy. "That is what awaits us all."

Alina shook her head and pulled herself up, pulled away from him. "No," she said. "I don't want that."

She thought about the eyes of those Gods, how they looked at her and saw nothing. Alina had a soul, every human had a soul, and her heart beat in her chest, and she loved, and was loved, and she laughed, and she fucked and she ate and she breathed—

But what had awaited her in the afterlife hadn't been peace, it had been nothingness. Even now, she still could barely feel the blood in her fingertips, and her chest felt empty.

It was a loneliness that hollowed her out; a hundred broken hearts at once and a thousand broken mirrors to her flesh would feel like bliss compared to a moment back there.

Alina couldn't stop the tears flowing down her cheeks.

"I've been here for thousands of years, Alina," said the shadow. "I was stuck, I was never sent on. I have remained here and seen others grow, and I Changed. I grew stronger here, I found a Voice, I remembered my Name.

"But none of this, none of that, can ever compare to what the world once offered me. What it offers you Alina.

"Blood, sweat, life. Here, it is empty. Beyond, it is..."

He paused, and she finished for him, "Obsolescence."

His silence said everything.

A light went off in her head. "Why did you show me that," she asked. Her voice was hard slate in her mouth.

The shadow glided, a show of innocence. "I wanted you to know."

"No," she spat. "You want me."

A shadow who had existed for thousands of years, who had found the Plane to the afterlife and had met hundreds, maybe thousands, of other shifters, and he told her within moments the secrets of this universe.

He hadn't been lying at all. What she saw had indeed been the afterlife, and the Truth was now lodged in her mind for the rest of her pitiful life, but this shadow had no intention of staying here. He planned on possessing her.



He took her there to weaken her—to anger her and to frighten her. In the moment she would try to throw him back into the ether, to hold on to whatever vestiges of life he'd given her, he would grab onto her, possess her body, and live her life until she died.

The selfish fucking *prick*.

Before he could get the jump on her, Alina stabbed her ring into her palm and held her breath while she grabbed hold of him to bind them. She had strength in her, she knew, and she could win this fight if she acted quickly.

But the shadow grabbed on and sank its teeth into her soul. She screamed and she could hear him too while her own soul kicked and bucked. She bit her tongue and blood flowed down her mouth, she spat it on him and he began to melt like acid where the droplets clung. He ripped into her hand and she pulled back hard, nearly taking her hand off to get away from him.

She tried to throw him, to grab onto his energy and cast her away from him with all of her strength. Her body and breath heaved, mind reeled and her blood sang.

But one hair's breadth of his shadow still remained attached to her—no bigger than a splinter—as she finished her throw, and as she plummeted back into her body, she could feel him hanging on like a leech.

Her awareness pounded back into her body, and she could feel him writhing around her heart, sucking on her marrow.

Alina's corporeal hand clutched at her chest but she couldn't get to him, he was going to have her.

She had completely forgotten about the guy in the doorway.

“Whoa!” he yelled, running toward her, “what the fuck!”

She tried to warn him off, but her mouth wouldn't move and her nails were embedded into her chest, desperately trying to claw the shadow out of her. All it took was a single touch, less than an entire fingerprint, and suddenly the vice around her heart disappeared, and the man beside her crumpled to the floor.

Alina fell to the ground, unable to stay conscious. She looked at the silent and still face of the man beside her, and all went dark.

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“That sounded gnarly, man.”

Alina's brow furrowed, but her eyes remained closed. She felt like death, like her soul had been sucked out of her and shoved into a washing machine before being crumpled back into her body.

Honestly, that description wasn't entirely inaccurate from what had happened that morning.

Alina pried her eyes open and shielded them from the sun blinding her from the window. She had arrived at ten that morning, and it didn't appear to be past the afternoon. Whether it was that day or not, she wasn't sure.

"Where the fuck am I?" she tried to ask, but it sounded more like a record playing backward than it did any comprehensible sentence.

"Yo, ma'am," a guy on the other side of the room said. "That was some crazy shit that just happened. They could hear you down the street."

Alina wanted to roll her eyes, but she was in too much pain to even be sarcastic right then.

The one thing she did notice however, was that she was definitely not being possessed by a shadow demon from the Fourth Dimension of time and space. Small mercies, she thought to herself.

"Here," another man said. Mal, if she remembered his name correctly. He handed her a glass of water and she drank it ravenously, spilling some on the blankets and mattress she'd been resting on. She wiped her chin when she was done, and she took a deep breath.

When she looked up to thank him, his eyes gave her pause. They'd been blue, she remembered, but now they were a shade darker than the shadows, a black like night or an endless void.

"You—" she said, and he reached forward and squeezed her wrist, tightly.

"I think we're good here, man," he said to the other guy.

"You sure, bro?"

"Yeah," said the shadow inhabiting the dark-haired puppet. "We're good."

The blonde guy shrugged. "Suit yourself. Pizza's downstairs if she wants any."

Alone in the room, Alina's hands went cold.

"Get out," she said, voice low and threatening.

"I got out," he said, and he was still gripping her wrist. "I'm sorry it had to be this way Alina, but think of it.

"You and me, together. I know my way through the Plane, and I can show you at the end of this life. We'll wait there together, and we can pull each other out every time.

"Nothing but this, forever." He gestured around them, between them.

Alina felt her pulse pounding in her ears, the sweat between her breasts, and the uncomfortable soreness of her muscles all over. She was sick, tired—no, exhausted—but when she thought about the Fifth Plane, her lips went cold.

The thought of going back there made her gut sink.

“I don’t even know your name,” Alina said, avoiding his eyes. She was too vulnerable right then; she was standing in a storm on the other side of the door from a wolf and a warm fire. “And you just tried to fucking possess me.”

“My name is Aleksander,” he said. His fingertips rubbed small circles into her skin. “And I didn’t possess you. I just,” he paused, searching for the words, “used you for transportation.”

Alina scoffed and compelled her frightened tears back where they came from.

“We’re strong, Alina,” he told her, not letting go over her wrist, but loosening his grasp. “We can live forever this way.”

He finally let her go, and stood. The silence between them stretched, and Alina felt her stomach clench at the thought of going back to that Fifth Dimension. It could be in an hour, the next day, a year from then; someday she would die, and she would become obsolete.

Truly alone.

“I don’t want to be alone anymore,” he whispered, understanding her completely. Maybe that was why he had shown her, too. For the chance of someone understanding oblivion. He looked down at her, and reached out his hand.

And in her moment of weakness, Alina took it.

## End Notes

btw i've just decided the blond guy is nikolai but he's just high as fuck, which is why he sounds like a bozo

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